

HONORING THE FISHER HOUSE
AND THE REPUBLICAN CLUB OF
CENTRAL PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA

HON. GINNY BROWN-WAITE

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 23, 2009

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the Republican Club of Central Pasco County for their support of the Fisher House at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, Florida.

Military families are the first line of support for our servicemen and women: they sit up at night waiting for their phone call and they send them comforts from home to sustain them while they fight for our freedom a half a world away.

Some families are called on to support and encourage their loved ones long after they've returned from the battles of war. For them, the Fisher House often becomes their "home away from home".

Since it opened its doors in 2007, the Fisher House in Tampa has hosted more than 1,200 people. The 16,000-square-foot house can accommodate up to 21 families at a time, and averages 35 guests per night. The average length of stay is two months, but two families have been there since the house opened.

Nationwide, the Fisher House program has made available nearly three million days of lodging since the program originated in 1990. They are operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs and rely on donations to the Fisher House Foundation so that no family has to pay to stay at any Fisher House.

The Republican Club of Central Pasco County, Florida, continually supports the Fisher House Foundation and our military men and women. This weekend, they will host the 2nd biennial event, "A Night for Heroes" in support of the Fisher House Foundation.

Madam Speaker, just as our military men and women believe it is their duty to serve our Nation; it is our duty to support them. The Republican Club of Central Pasco County has truly answered the call. On behalf of this Congress, I thank them for their unyielding commitment to this most important cause.

**COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION
ACT OF 2010**

SPEECH OF

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 22, 2009

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration of the bill (H.R. 3619) to authorize appropriations for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2010, and for other purposes:

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Chair, I want to applaud my friend, Chairman JIM OBERSTAR,

and his committee for putting together a strong bill that invests in the needs of our Coast Guard. This bill makes many key investments in the ability of our Coast Guard to protect our nation, guard our waterways, and make sure it is "always ready" to respond.

However, I rise today in reluctant opposition to this bill because of the very significant changes it makes to the admissions process for the United States Coast Guard Academy.

As many of my colleagues know, the Coast Guard Academy is located in my district, in New London, Connecticut. Established at Fort Trumbull in 1910 first as the School of Instruction to the U.S. Revenue Cutter Academy and then as the U.S. Coast Guard Academy after the consolidation of the Life Saving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service in 1915, the Academy has been a part of New London at its present site since 1932. Over its last century in New London, the Academy has helped to train, educate and shape generations of young leaders of the Coast Guard.

Today, the Coast Guard Academy is a highly competitive educational institution. Called "the best kept secret in higher education" by the Princeton Review, it is a challenging school that attracts driven, committed leaders who go on to serve our nation in the many diverse roles played by our Coast Guard today. In fact, the number of applicants who said that they were not seeking admission to one of the other service academies—that the Coast Guard Academy was their first choice—rose from 61 percent of the class of 2009 to 66 percent of the class of 2011.

As of July 2009, the Coast Guard Academy had 973 cadets enrolled representing 43 states and 15 foreign nations. For the newest class, the class of 2013, 1,672 completed the application process, 411 were offered appointments to the Academy, and 288 cadets—17 percent of those who applied—were sworn in. Nearly 80 percent of Academy graduates go on to graduate programs, with most paid for by the Coast Guard, and 85 percent of graduates choose to serve beyond their required five-year commitment.

The Academy is particularly proud of its high recruitment of women cadets. Of the total corps of cadets, 27 percent are women: 23 percent female in the class of 2010, 30 percent in the class of 2011, 28 percent in the class of 2012, and 29 percent in the class of 2013. Its success in this area sets the Coast Guard Academy apart from other service academies, and is worthy of recognition.

However, there are two areas in which both the Congress and the Coast Guard Academy agree that there is some work to do—the recruitment of underrepresented minorities in the cadet corps, as well as a lack of geographical diversity. I absolutely believe that, as a publicly funded institution, the Coast Guard Academy should represent a cross-section of our society, reflecting the racial, gender and geographic composition of our nation. Any young person, regardless of race, gender or geographic location, should have the opportunity to serve our nation as an officer in the Coast Guard.

In my ongoing discussions with the leadership of the Coast Guard Academy, they have made clear that some of their top priorities include increasing diversity, both of underrepresented minorities and geographical regions, and spreading the word about the excellent education it has to offer to a wider audience. While involving Members of Congress in the application process may be one of the answers to these challenges, there are likely other ways to achieve these goals that should be considered as well before taking this step.

For example, the Academy has significantly increased its efforts to get the word out about their unique institution and what they have to offer to underrepresented minority and geographic populations. For example, they are specifically directing recruitment efforts through mailings, advertising on online college search websites, and ramping up efforts to get recruiters in cities and regions with high minority populations, as well as those states and regions not typically represented at the Academy.

There is some indication that these efforts are paying off. For instance, compared to last year, inquiries to the Academy by minority students are up 40 percent to 1,800. And, online applications from minority students are up 34 percent to 317.

In addition, the Coast Guard Academy recently released a comprehensive Strategic Plan focusing on diversity, leadership, and character development. This plan outlines a clear goal of achieving 20–25 percent representation by underrepresented minorities by 2015, and in faculty and staff by 2020. This plan is getting off the ground now.

Even without congressional nominations, there is much each of us can do to contribute to the makeup of the Academy. For example, we can all include Coast Guard Academy admissions information our offices distribute related to service academy nominations, and direct interested constituents to the institution. And, we can ensure that our websites include information about the Academy. Earlier this year, a survey of congressional websites showed that over half made no mention of the Coast Guard Academy and did not post a link or other information about the institution. In March, I circulated a "Dear Colleague" letter urging that Members make sure their websites reflect this important information—and I will continue to work with my colleagues to encourage them to do so.

I strongly believe that any change to the application process or the character of the institution must be carefully considered, hand in hand with the Academy, before moving forward. The manager's amendment to this bill included a provision to require the Government Accountability Office, GAO, to evaluate the Coast Guard Academy's efforts to improve minority and geographic diversity. While I strongly support this review and look forward to its findings, I am disappointed that this